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More from Agnes Paschal, 94 Years – The Abraham Hill Drowning Incident

NOVEMBER 3, 2024 12:41 PM \ [LEAVE A COMMENT](#) \ [BY COLLIERHERITAGE](#) \ [EDIT](#)

Originally posted July 20, 2020.



Birdsong House, 2017

Here is another story of the Vines Collier family told by a first-hand acquaintance and neighbor in the book, ***Ninety-Four Years, Agnes Paschal***. (see the CHF post *Agnes Paschal: The Vines Collier Family and Salem Baptist Church*, dated January 19, 2019). The book, originally published in 1871, contains much information about the community around Salem Baptist Church. Now available through The Reprint Company, Spartanburg, South Carolina, this historical memoir of Agnes Paschal and her family was written by her son, George W. Paschal, following her passing. The writing style is typical of that of the 1800s.

This particular event took place in 1818 and involves 43-year old William Collier, son of Vines, and William's two friends, Abraham Hill and Freeman Birdsong. The three lived in relatively close

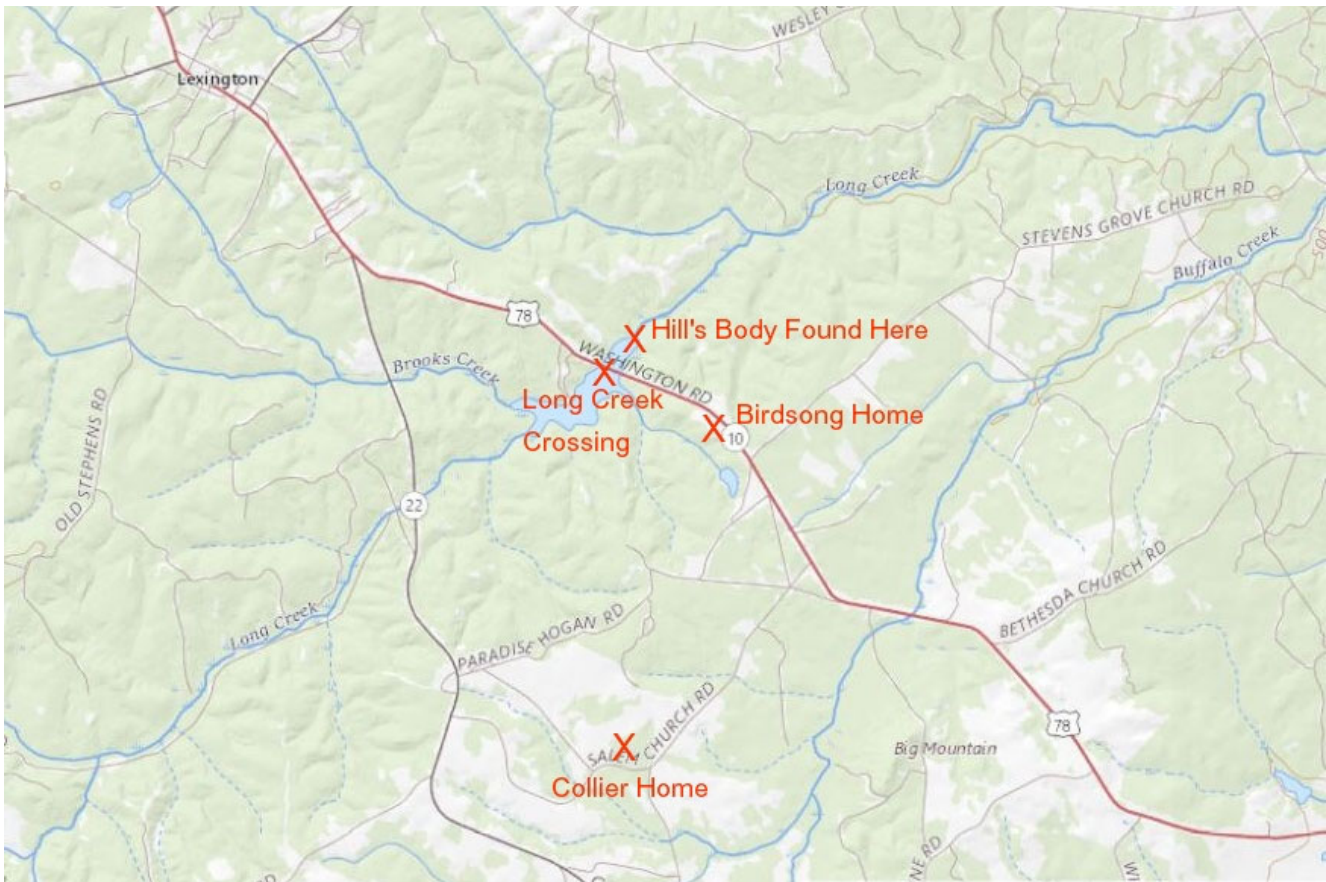
proximity southeast of Lexington, Georgia. Collier and Birdsong lived along Long Creek, while Hill lived some distance away. Abraham Hill was a benefactor of Agnes Paschal's family. The book characterizes him as a man of great wealth and influence.

The three neighbors, having spent an evening in Lexington, were returning on horseback to their respective homes. The book speculates, but with quite a degree of certainty, that the men may have been drinking, but were "not intoxicated in the sense of that country."

Their path took them along what is now Highway 78, which runs from Lexington to Washington. At the time of this story, the road continued on past Washington to provide the most direct route to Augusta.

The three stopped to water their horses at the ford where the road crossed Long Creek. Birdsong watered his horse and went ahead to his house, which was on the road a little over a mile away. When Collier's horse finished drinking, he rode on to his home, located approximately two miles to the south. Hill was left to continue on alone to his residence. Hill and Birdsong both lived along the same route so the question later arose as to why Birdsong did not wait until Hill's horse had watered and the two could have traveled on together.

Hill's horse arrived at home without rider or saddle. The next morning the horse was backtracked to the crossing and then 400 yards downstream to a beaver pond where Hill's body was found along with the saddle. There was no evidence of violence or any suggestion of foul play. However, it was never clear why Hill had left the main road and gone into the forest. Many questions were raised about the death of this prominent citizen but the mystery was never solved.



Here is the text from the book, *Ninety-four Years, Agnes Paschal*.

... Abraham Hill, upon a part of whose estate we lived, was a man of warm heart and genial habit. . . He belonged to one of the wealthiest, most extensive, and influential families in the county, and indeed in the South...

Abraham Hill, in the fall of 1818, had gone to Lexington on horseback, as was his wont. He returned on the Augusta Road, accompanied by two of his neighbors, William Collier and Freeman Birdsong, one of whom resided on the west and the other on the east side of Long Creek, each about 300 yards from the stream. Collier rode with them to Long Creek in order to water his horse. Their horses drank in the creek, and Birdsong rode forward to his residence. Hill should have accompanied Birdsong, as his own residence lay three miles farther down the road. But, as Birdsong left the horses of Hill and Collier drinking, perhaps he thought little of it. Collier turned his horse and rode back to his residence. Hill's horse was tracked from the ford, four hundred yards down the creek through a wooded swamp, until he came to an obstruction known as the Beaver Pond, which was a small lake of water seemingly formed by the branch from Birdsong's spring. The lake was of the depth of eight or ten feet, of the width of two hundred feet, and of the length of one hundred yards. In the edge of this pond Abraham Hill was discovered next morning at a point where his saddle had fallen off. His horse was found at home, tracked back through the woods to the pond. There were no evidences of violence which might not have been caused by falling from his horse. There was every evidence that the horse had swam from bank to bank time and again. But whether this was before or after he lost his rider there were no means of determining. There was no road which should have induced the man voluntarily to have taken that direction home, although the course was a little nearer. It was believed that neither of the three neighbors who were last seen together was

entirely sober, although not intoxicated in the sense of that country. Collier and Birdsong were men of unimpeachable integrity; and they were each at their homes immediately after they parted with Hill. The mystery was never solved. Many of the friends and relations of the unfortunate man attended the coroner's inquest and the funeral; and such search was made as the means of detection at that day afforded, but with no kind of success.

In 2017, the remnant hull of the Freeman Birdsong house could be seen along Highway 78. The tall frontal columns had been sold and removed earlier. By November 2023, the structure had deteriorated even more.



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